

Azerbaijan

The Tartar Republic of the Land of Flames

By Hamilton Fyfe

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IF you scratch a Russian you find a Tartar," says the French proverb, which contains, like most proverbs, some truth, but by no means the whole. The Tartars, or Tatars, a race related to the Mongols, have roamed about Eastern Russia and traded all over the country from time immemorial. Many suppose they drifted in with Jenghiz Khan, but there were Tartars in Russia long before. They certainly have influenced the Russian character, both by mingling Eastern with Slav blood, and by implanting certain elements of Persian and Chinese culture together with ideas of government which belong to the East rather than the West. The streak of ferocity which is to be found in the Russian nature, combined with mildness and friendly toleration, may be due to the Tartar strain.

But the Tartar is still distinct from the Russian. Nothing approaching an absorption of one race in the other has taken place. This is due chiefly to the difference of religion. The Tartars were originally Buddhists, or Shamans, but they exchanged this faith for Islam, and they have been Moslems ever since. The founding of the State of Azerbaijan, as a consequence of the Russian Revolution, was specially interesting, because it brought into being the first Moslem Republic. This was composed of the provinces of Baku and Elisavetopol, with a coast line on the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus Mountains sheltering it on the west,

and Persia to the south. Here the Tartars form the majority of the population.

They can easily be distinguished from Russians, Armenians, Georgians, and other nationalities inhabiting this part of the world by their flat, wide faces, yellow complexions, small eyes set on the slant, high cheek-bones, thin hair, and frequently beardless chins. These are the racial characteristics of the Mongols also, but in them they are more marked than in the Tartars. The Tartars are a pleasanter looking people. They are hard workers and trustworthy, shrewd, and thrifty. If left alone, they live quietly and contentedly in their own communities or with Christians. No attempts are made to convert them. The Russian peasant says: "God gave them their religion, as He gave us ours." It is only when the Tartars are stirred up to hatred of Christians by fanatics or by such police spies and agents provocateurs as flourished under the Tsars, and were employed to provoke pogroms, that their habitual calm is disturbed.

Unfortunately, the educated among them are the more inclined to fanaticism. Instead of enlarging the mind, education upon purely religious lines has a narrow-

ing effect. Learning confined to theology is apt to set up barriers rather than to cast them down. Tartars who have been students call Christians infidels (which is, after all, only what the Christians call them). They will not mix freely with them. They feel that it is the duty



AZERBAIJAN AND ITS PEOPLES



TWO FIGHTING TARTARS OF NIJ

They descend, almost unchanged, from the first of the old invaders of the Caspian Sea oil land. Untamed by riches, they form the fighting element of the little Moslem state over which Turk and Russian have fought

of good Moslems to despise them. Fortunately, but a small proportion of the Tartars are educated; for the most part they are kindly and hospitable to all men.

Some of them still lead a wandering, pastoral life, driving their flocks of sheep from place to place. Most have settled down to agriculture. If you arrive at a Tartar village and ask for a night's shelter you will be given a heap of rugs and cushions to sleep on, and you may sleep soundly in the knowledge that both the person and the property of a guest are sacred. A sheep will be killed for you, and the whole of it, cut up into pieces, will be boiled in a huge cauldron. This will be your meal, in all probability without vegetables or bread.

Your hosts will pick out specially succulent morsels from the wooden bowl in which the mutton is served, and push them into your mouth as a sign of their gladness at your visit. In another bowl koumiss (mares' milk) is passed round to each in turn.

The Tartar women are veiled as a rule, according to Mahomedan ordinance. They cannot take any part in the entertainment of male guests, but as they are neither particularly well-looking nor particularly intelligent, this is no great drawback. By way of diversion music may be provided; the instrument most common among the Tartars is a kind of flute, from which they produce airs both plaintive and cheerful, some of the latter being so infectious that they generally cause the hearers to stand up and "shake a leg." The gramophone has found its way into many Tartar homes, and is listened to

with delight. As you sit, or, more probably, lie on the floor with a cushion under you, among these pleasant, friendly folk, it is difficult to understand how the appalling massacres at Baku can have happened which, in 1905, horrified the world.

In this connexion, however, there are two things to be kept in mind. First, the fighting was done by the town Tartars, who are a more desperate lot than the countryfolk. Not that they are generally inclined to bloodshed; they are, indeed, an orderly population, anxious, most of all, to get on with their business. But they are capable, when their fanaticism is stirred, of the most atrocious deeds. In the second place the Armenians against whom the



NOMAD TARTAR CAMELMAN TAKING LAMBSKINS TO MARKET

Although the Tartars settled in the Southern Caucasus long before the Turks broke through, many of them still maintain the old wandering pastoral life, and, mounted on their camels, lead their flocks from pasturage to pasturage. This Tartar specialises in Astrakhan lambs, which are killed immediately after birth, the skins being made into fashionable Astrakhan furs

fanaticism of the Tartars was inflamed, committed atrocities almost as bad, when once the fighting had begun.

The first battle between Tartars and Armenians, which lasted three days, was begun by a Tartar oilfield owner, a rich man and influential, who shot an Armenian with whom he had a private

quarrel. He then gave himself up to a policeman, but before they could get away a number of Armenians gathered, and he was shot dead, too. Then the cry "The Armenians have risen" went through the Tartar quarters, and pitiless killing began. In September, seven months later, there was another

AZERBAIJAN, THE TARTAR REPUBLIC



A CAUCASIAN PILLION

They live in the mountains above Baku in the rude cabin beside which they have mounted together their only horse

outbreak of savagery. As the mayor of Baku said, "Tartars and Armenians killed each other without knowing why." Afterwards it transpired that the Russian authorities had egged on the Moslems to attack the Armenians for some political reason. Since then the two elements in Azerbaijan have lived in peace, and that is what the great mass, both of Christians and of Moslems, desire.

Here and there tribes or sects still keep up old fanatical customs, such as that known as "Chucks Wucksi," after a cry that is repeated frequently and fiercely by worshippers who, like the priests of Baal, cut themselves with knives. They

slash their heads in a frenzy, and many inflict fatal wounds. Others beat themselves with rods or with chains. The idea is to do penance for sins, and it is therefore not surprising that the village where this ceremony of self-mutilation is most savagely celebrated has also the reputation of being inhabited chiefly by robbers. Some of the mutilators, however, are engaged by rich Tartars to do vicarious penance. The rich men ease their consciences by payment; the poor wretches who gash themselves are glad to earn the money.

Many Tartars have become very wealthy, especially since the Baku oilfields rivalled the production of America and prevented the oil kings of the



THE TARTAR ROAD TO REFINEMENT

Father, a Tartar, has made money out of the oilfield, and bought a Georgian wife. She has dressed her boys in the costume of her people, and is bringing them up like little gentlemen of European refinement



FUGITIVES FROM THE LAND OF EVERLASTING FLAMES

They are Persians of Baku, escaping by a Russian steamer to the farther side of the Caspian Sea, in the days when Turks and revolutionaries were making life uncomfortable for quiet people. It was the ancient Persians who discovered the fiery oil-wells, set up their fire temples there, and gave the land its name of Azerbaijan, or "country of everlasting flames".

Photo Miss C. Y. Hunter

United States from establishing a monopoly. Baku is the capital of Azerbaijan. It lies on a fine bay in the Caspian, and from the sea its flat-roofed, white houses, built up a hill and amidst gardens, have an attractive appearance. It has many large public buildings and many private palaces upon which money has been lavished by those who have made money out of petroleum.

From very early times the region around Baku has been known as the source of "natural fire." One of the most ancient temples in the world still stands some ten miles to the north of the city, a temple of fire worship as practised by the Persians. Here the sacred fire is still tended. Jets of naphtha gas are lighted, and before them a dervish chants monotonously and rings a bell. Pilgrims come from near and far to see the flame, though now it is no longer a marvel. Not even the once miraculous "setting fire to the sea" can cause

much wonderment in these days, which have seen enormous columns of petroleum hurled into the air by subterranean force for weeks on end, and flares of immense size lighting up whole districts. The surface of the sea is at many places covered with oil, which comes up from a depth of fifteen or twenty feet; throwing a piece of flaming tow upon it sets the "water on fire" for some distance.

Once the Baku region belonged to the Shahs of Persia; it was conquered and kept by Russia early in the nineteenth century. From that date very little was heard of it until the 'seventies, when it began to be talked of as the scene of an oil boom. The Russian Tsar put up several pieces of land in the oil-bearing area to auction. These were valued at some £50,000: they fetched nearly £300,000. A notion prevailed that they were the only lands beneath which petroleum was known to exist, and the bidding was furious. Then stories came



MEDLEY OF RACES IN THE CENTRE OF AZERBAIJAN

These are some of the folk of Elisavetopol, a town between Baku and Batum. They include the original Tat, who is an ancient Persian and first owner, his neighbours the Armenian and Georgian, the raiding Kurd, the invading Tartar and later Turki conquerors. The womenfolk show some effects of blends of blood in the old harem life through the centuries

to Europe of "spouters" or "gushers" which rose high into the air and wasted unimaginable quantities of oil before they could be "capped." When the drills had got down to a certain depth they plunged into the subterranean lakes of petroleum, and through the pipes, which had been sunk as the drillers worked, the oil came up with a rush, carrying everything before it.

No matter how heavy was the cap over the mouth of the well, a fierce burst of oil would blow it off, and it might take months to get the spouter under control. It was soon recognized that the Caucasian oilfields were as rich as any in the world, and they were quickly covered with the wooden derricks over the well-heads which make all oilfields look like a burnt forest, unutterably desolate and disagreeable. Someone, struck by this and by the stained, grimy aspect of the workers, nicknamed one of the fields the Devil's Bazaar, and the name has stuck to it ever since. If the oil for which the world is asking in greater quantity than ever is

steadily produced in Azerbaijan, the Republic will be, for its size, the richest state in the world in natural resources. Even without oil it would be well off, for it has fertile soil; valuable fisheries, including sturgeon, salmon, and herring; a trade in caviar (sturgeon's roe) second only to that of Astrakhan; forests abounding in oak and other hard woods, for which there is continual demand.

What the people need is tranquillity. For a time they were sorely perplexed. At first they decided to form a federal state with Georgia and Armenia, but this Transcaucasian Republic did not last more than a year. Then they were obliged to yield to Bolshevik attack. In 1922, however, the federation was revived. But if they are let alone and are sensible enough to let others alone, the good qualities of the Azerbaijan people will, no doubt, win through, and the first Moslem Republic will show that the followers of Islam are as competent to manage their own affairs as the adherents of other faiths.



THE LESSON OF BAKU'S HORSE-DRAWN FIRE ENGINE

In spite of her abundant oil power, Baku has no quick-starting, petrol-driven fire-engine. Her best firemen are dead or fugitive, as also are her fine body of European engineers. Overrun by Armenian revolutionaries, Turkish invaders, and Russian Bolsheviks, the city became empty of real human ability, and was lucky in having enough food for its horses and workfolk



FIREMEN OF THE LAND OF ETERNAL FIRES

This is the fire department of Baku town, which lies on a rocky peninsula, through which burst streams of inflammable gas, as well as springs of naphtha and spouting oil. Modern refining works and ways of oil transport have not diminished the number of fires that gave the country its ancient name

Photos. Maynard Owen Williams



A BELGIAN MILKWOMAN ON HER MORNING ROUND

In the smaller towns of Belgium the daily milk supplies are still distributed from door to door in little carts generally drawn by dogs. Various breeds are employed, and they pull weights which are surprising to those unaware of the dog's powers as a draught animal

Photo, Donald McLeish



BENEVOLENT GOVERNMENT KEEPS AN EYE ON THE MILK

An inspector recording the details of a sample of milk he has taken for examination. The fine team of animals harnessed to the cart help their owner in her business in various ways, as, for example, by turning the wheel churns in common use throughout Belgium